

ZYGOTE

Zygot keeps a stiff upper lip about Viagra tagging, but welcomes an admission of failure from a security software company

HARD LUCK

Things are looking up for erectile dysfunction, thanks to RFID tags. The drug company Pfizer has invested five million dollars (around £2.8m) to integrate RFID tags with its best-known product, Viagra. These miniature computer chips are attached to the product packaging to keep track of batch deliveries and prove that the item is genuine. There are enormous numbers of counterfeit Viagra pills around, but now end-users can verify packaging codes using a standard reader and then they can check on the Pfizer website that their little blue pills are the real thing.

Pfizer has shrugged off concerns about the invasion of privacy, stating that its RFID tags cannot be used to store patient information. But on the official Viagra website, where "three steps to better erections" are up for grabs, an awful lot of personal data is collected in ways that are familiar to anyone who has ever analysed login procedures and website statistics. "We may target our marketing and healthcare messaging depending on information we have about you," is Pfizer's catch-all disclaimer.

Ah well, sometimes it's hard to be impotent. Mind you, you probably run a greater risk of losing control of your flaccid medical details if you use a Boots Advantage Card, where a complete

record of your every lotion, potion and emotion is stored.

CHOICE WORDS

The government is determined to offer "choice" to the nation's sick and dying. Zygot applauds this policy, and given the opportunity, would choose not to be sick or die at all. 'Choose and Book' is the flagship system for delivering the government's patient-choice agenda. It allows doctors and patients to select a hospital and a convenient appointment time, all at the click of a mouse.

Primary Care Trusts have even been offered a cash incentive of £100,000 if half of their GP referrals are made through this Choose and Book system. Sadly, the take-up figure has fallen a bit short of this target. Nonetheless, the government has just revised its implementation goal for the computer system to 90 per cent of GP referrals within the year.

According to the Department of Health's own figures, which have just been released, the use of Choose and Book so far has not been 90 per cent, or even 50 per cent, but 0.007 per cent. A remarkable statistic, and one that Zygot can only associate with 007, and a licence to kill.

MUCK RAKING

A distress call was picked up by the maritime rescue centre in RAF Kinloss, and computers quickly

identified the source as emanating from a vessel hundreds of miles away, near Portsmouth Harbour. A coastguard helicopter searched for two hours before the SOS signal was traced to a semi-detached house, where a Freeview digibox was found to be broadcasting a perfect imitation of a ship going down from the back of a TV set.

Zygot always thought digiboxes were for receiving rubbish, not broadcasting it, and experts from the RAF and Ofcom confirmed that the incident was "impossible". This proves yet again that failsafe systems fail to be safe. So it is that Zygot congratulates the leading security software company, F-Secure, which has admitted to a serious security flaw in its own security software. "Better to be safe than sorry," said their spokesman.

What a refreshing attitude this is, and what a change to see a computer company coming clean and admit that embarrassing failures are as common as muck.

TAKING THE MIK

According to The Mikado and The Ramones, the punishment should fit the crime. So what do you think the tariff should be for sending out 280 million spam emails? James McCalla is a resident of the State of Florida, and under US law it would have been perfectly legal for him to clutter up the world's inboxes with his get-rich-quick schemes,

gambling scams and pornographic pettifogging. But he made one big mistake when he used cis.net as a fake return address.

The judge found that Mr McCalla had impersonated the legitimate organisation CIS Internet Services, 280 million times, and commercial impersonation is illegal under the law. So the judge made the punishment fit the crime, and awarded a penalty against McCalla in the sum of 11 billion dollars (around £6.2 billion). This will only take him a few hundred thousand years to pay off. Which sounds just about right.

SIN TAX ERROR

When parliament voted to give the UK identity tax the go-ahead, Zygot noted that the excuse for getting us to pay for the privilege of carrying ID cards had been changed. It is now "to prevent ID fraud". Zygot has examined the Home Office estimates of current ID fraud, and is amused that they include corporate VAT scams, lost credit cards, the cost of police investigation into rogue traders and all manner of things that are not related to identity theft in the slightest.

When all the padding is stripped out of the figures, the real cost of ID fraud to the UK consumer and taxpayer runs at £494 million. Which works out at about £8 for every person. Compare that to the £93 we'll each have to stump up in ID tax. The underlying cost to the taxpayer of implementing the biometric system is still unknown, but estimates start at around £6 billion. But don't worry, Zygot has the answer. Billions can be saved if victims of ID fraud are simply paid compensation. And if this can't be raised from income tax, we should set up a compensation fund from the stupidity tax, otherwise known as the National Lottery. ☐

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220: WINDOWS VISTA



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...when Microsoft withdraws its support for the previous system